



*Brachypteryx cryptica* sp. nov. from Tirap District, Arunachal Pradesh.

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## A NEW SPECIES, AND A NEW SUBSPECIES OF BIRD FROM TIRAP DISTRICT, ARUNACHAL PRADESH, AND COMMENTS ON THE SUBSPECIES OF *STACHYRIS NIGRICEPS* BLYTH.<sup>1</sup>

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(With a coloured plate)

A new species of shortwing (Turdinae) is described from five specimens collected in dense evergreen rain forest along the Noa Dihing River, eastern Arunachal Pradesh. The new form is close in appearance to *Brachypteryx hyperythra*, but somewhat larger, the dull female plumage (in both sexes), more streaked, and lacking the concealed white eyebrow patch found in all other species of the genus except for *B. major* of South India. A new subspecies of Scimitar Babbler (*Pomatorhinus*), is also described from the same locality. Comments on the geographical races of Blackthroated Babbler (*Stachyris*) are given. (Both latter genera belong to Timaliinae).

During a second survey trip to Arunachal Pradesh, my wife and I were privileged to join Dr. Sálím Ali, and colleagues from the Bombay Natural History Society, on a month's camp along the Noa Dihing River on the border of the Namdapha wildlife reserve.

By the use of mist nets we secured and observed many species of birds, otherwise almost impossible to record. The extremely dense vegetation, a characteristic of mature,

unopened rainforest was penetrated only by a rough dirt track, accessible, at some seasons, by jeep. Heavy rain, beginning on March 15, greatly limited our observations. However, we were fortunate to obtain a small series of the following new species:

### *Brachypteryx cryptica* sp. nov. Enigmatic Shortwing

*Holotype*: United States National Museum of Natural History, no. 583152, adult male from 40-mile camp (Bhimraj camp), east of Miao, Noa Dihing River road (27° 40' N., 97° E. approx.), elevation 820 m (2650 ft.);

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collected 23 March, 1979, by S. Dillon Ripley, field number 254.

*Diagnosis:* in size and coloration nearest to *Brachypteryx hyperythra*, the little-known Rustybellied Shortwing, recorded from Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh (in Subansiri Dist.), Assam and Nagaland. Male plumage in the adult of *hyperythra* is strongly dimorphic, dark blue upperparts, blackish lores and sides of throat, concealed white supercilium, ferruginous below. The female is olive-brown above and pale ferruginous below with the center of the belly whitish. In contrast males and females of *cryptica* differ from the female plumage of *hyperythra* by somewhat lighter brown upperparts, Russet rather than Olive-brown (cf. Smithe, 1975), with noticeable buff shaft-streaks on the forehead and fore-crown producing a streaked effect. The feathers of the nares, anterior to the eyes, are coloured creamy-buff, giving the suggestion of a dull but distinct light patch, totally unlike the uniform olive-brown tone of *hyperythra*. Below, this species is pale creamish amber-brown, ranging to clay brown on the throat and upper breast, in contrast to the dark cinnamon of *hyperythra*. The shafts of the feathers of the breast in *cryptica* are margined at the ends with pale olive-brown, giving a streaked effect. Lower down the breast pales to buff and the abdomen is dull whitish, the flanks pale olive-brown, rather than dark as in *hyperythra*, and the undertail coverts warm buff rather than reddish-cinnamon. The effect produced is of a paler bird beneath, buff to whitish, rather than ferruginous to creamy.

Stuart Baker (1933) writes of males of two species of *Brachypteryx* as not donning the slaty-blue upperparts of adult dress, and still being in breeding condition, in the eastern part of the range, namely the hills of Nagaland and the Patkoi Range in Arunachal.

Whether these birds are fully adult and maintain a hen plumage throughout life is not known. Such birds could come into breeding condition in the first year, assuming dimorphic adult plumage later, in the second year?

The specimens of *cryptica* collected shed no light on the presence of dimorphism in the species. One male has somewhat enlarged gonads (holotype). At least it can be maintained that this species is distinct based on these specimens obtained. If the range is as given, namely the Patkoi foothills of eastern Arunachal Pradesh, it may be that the species has progressed a step further than its congeners, and suppressed a dimorphic male plumage?

From the other *Brachypteryx* species, as the Key in the INDIAN HANDBOOK indicates (1973, 8: 204), *cryptica* differs in the creamy umber brown throat and underparts rather than white in *leucophrys*, warm brown in *montana*, or the chestnut upperparts and vermiculated underparts in *stellata*. It differs in size also from these species, being close only to *hyperythra*.

*Distribution:* Known only from the type locality.

*Measurements:* See Table 1.

*Remarks:* The above measurements indicate that this new species is a larger bird than *hyperythra*, with a longer tail, (tail-wing index of males .80 versus .07 for *hyperythra*), with a somewhat stouter, slightly longer bill compared to the latter species. No field observations were possible with these netted birds, often collected in heavy rain.

***Pomatorhinus ferruginosus namdapha*,  
subsp. nov.**

*Holotype:* United States National Museum of Natural History, no. 583153, adult male, from 40-mile camp (Bhimraj camp), east of

TABLE I  
MEASUREMENTS OF *Brachypteryx cryptica* AND *hyperythra*

Sex	Wing	Tail	Tarsus	Culmen	Middle Toe	Bill Width	Weight
<i>B. cryptica</i>							
♂ (Type)	66 mm.	53	28.5	16.5	17	5	20.75 gr.
♂ (1)	67	54	30	17.5	17	5	20.75
♀ (3)	62-66	45	27.5-28.5	16.5	15-16.5	5-5.5	20.00 (1)
<i>B. hyperythra</i>							
♂ (6)	62-66.5 (63.5)	43-48 (44.5)	28.5-30 (29.2)	14.5-16 (15)	13.5-17 (15)	4-5.5	—
♀ (2)	61, 63	40, 41.5	27.5, 28.5	15, 15.5	13, 14	3, 5.5	—

Miao, Noa Dihing River Road (27° 40' N., 97° E. approx.), March 22, elevation 820 m. (2650 ft.), collected by S. Dillon Ripley, field number 251.

*Diagnosis:* differs from *Pomatorhinus ferruginosus ferruginosus* of east Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan and western Arunachal Pradesh in Kameng and Subansiri districts, in lacking the black cap and rusty red patch posterior to the nares at the commencement of the white supercilium, and the bright ferruginous lower throat, breast, and center of abdomen.

From *P. f. formosus* of the Garo, North Cachar, Naga and Manipur Hills, this population differs in having the crown dark olive-brown rather than russet, and in darker olive-brown back, the post-nasal spot at the commencement of the white supercilium is noticeably richer; whitish tinted with cinnamon-rufous, rather than whitish tinted with salmon. The lower throat, abdomen and breast is lighter than *formosus*, cinnamon, rather than dull dark cinnamon to pale cinnamon-rufous.

Compared to *P. f. stanfordi* of northeastern Burma (as well as *albogularis* of eastern Burma and northwest Thailand) this population differs by dark olive-brown rather than tawny brown back, a richer cinnamon-rufous post-nasal spot rather than a pale whitish area, tinted at its lower margin with creamy buff, and by dark dull cinnamon to pale cinnamon-rufous rather than dark yellowish-buff underparts.

In measurements all these populations seem rather overlapping;

*ferruginosus* 5 ♂; wing 85-92; tail 98-105; culmen 29-31.5 mm.

*namdapha* 2 ♂, ♀; wing 90-93; tail 101, 104; culmen 29-30.

*formosus* ♂, 4 ♀, ♀ wing 89-97; tail 103-112; culmen 29-31.

*stanfordi* 2 ♂, ♀, ♀ wing 92-95; tail 99-111; culmen 29-32.

Weight; *namdapha*, 2 ♂ 47, 50, ♀ 44 gr.

There seems to be no difference in colour of the eyes, bill or legs.

*Remarks:* On different occasions in mid-March, individuals of this shy and elusive scimitar babbler were heard calling in the dense wet evergreen forest, but seen only with the greatest difficulty. The type specimen was in breeding condition (testes enlarged).

### *Stachyris nigriceps* Blyth

The collection of additional fresh specimens of *Stachyris nigriceps* in eastern Arunachal Pradesh reveals that, although my descriptions of *S. n. spadix* (1948) and *S. n. coei* (1952) had a certain validity, I was unwise to distinguish these representatives of a cline as separate in the absence of intermediate geographic specimens.

*Stachyris nigriceps*, the Blackthroated Babbler (type locality, Nepal), of which I have examined many specimens, has a tendency to a black throat broadly or narrowly margined with white on the individual feathers. The ear coverts tend to be dark brown, almost blackish brown in some cases. As one examines specimens from farther east along the Himalayas into Arunachal Pradesh (specimen from Kameng district, 1978) east of Bhutan, the throat becomes more uniformly blackish, lacking the whitish streaks or feather margins, until, crossing the Dihang (the main Brahmaputra channel through the mountains), the final outpost, namely the Mishmi Hills of Lohit district, the type locality of *coei* is reached. Here the throat is nearly black, and the ear coverts are similarly dark, blackish brown. I feel that this population really does represent a continuous cline, and that, therefore, the separation of a named population, *coei*, is unjustified.

*Stachyris n. spadix* (Laisung, north Cachar)

was separated by myself (1948) from *nigriceps* as having a dark blackish-gray unstreaked throat and by having the ear coverts lighter in colour, brown, approaching burnt-umber. From *S. n. collarti* (Margherita) this population was alleged to differ by having ear coverts brown rather than rufous-brown. The new series collected by us in Tirap district north-east of Margherita belong of course geographically with *collarti*, (Harrington, 1913) having warm-brown to rufous ear coverts, and unstreaked throats, but they are close enough in the colour of the ear coverts to specimens from the Garo Hills on the one hand and to those from northeastern Burma and northern Thailand on the other, to render their separation from *spadix* superfluous. There is a continuous cline towards darker ear coverts and slightly darker upper and lower parts, west to east as one examines specimens from the northern Patkoi Hills and east of Margherita, but these new specimens from Tirap district of Arunachal Pradesh have reddish brown ear coverts, rather than the blackish brown ear coverts of specimens to the north, in Lohit district.

Weights of this series in March are variable:

♂ (testes slightly enlarged, mid-March at 808 m altitude) 9.5 gr.

2♂ (testes enlarged, March 6, at 290 m altitude) 13.5 gr.

♀ (non-breeding, March 6, at 290 m altitude) 13.5 gr.

A single wintering male (Jan. 27) from Kameng weighed 22 g, 5 g heavier than specimens from Nepal, listed in the HANDBOOK (1971, 6, p. 175). Presumably this difference is explained by fat deposition at that season.

In my judgement then, number 1215 of the HANDBOOK (1971, 6: 174-177). *Stachyris nigriceps coei* Ripley, should be listed as a synonym of no. 1214, *Stachyris nigriceps nigriceps* Blyth,

the range of no. 1214 to include the Lohit district (Mishmi Hills) of Arunachal Pradesh. Number 1216 *Stachyris nigriceps spadix* Ripley, should be placed as a synonym of no. 1217 *Stachyris nigriceps coltarti* Harington, and the range of the latter should thus include Assam, Mizoram, Meghalaya south to Bangladesh hills, the Chittagong region, Burma and northern Thailand in the lower hills.

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